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ABSTRACT

An exploratory project, designed to facilitate non-violent interactions between activist students and police, is described. A total of 30 policemen and 161 volunteer college students, of whom 92 served as a no-treatment control group, were involved. The effects of 3 possible types of contact were studied: (1) squad-car riding; (2) informal dinners and "rap" sessions; and (3) encounter groups. Questionnaires which assessed attitudes and self-reported behavior toward police, as well as knowledge of the policeman's role, were administered to student subjects prior to and following the experimental conditions. Significant changes in both student and police attitudes and behaviors are reported to have resulted from their interactions under all 3 conditions. It is concluded that seemingly polarized groups, such as police and students, can increase respect and understanding for one another when provided with a proper sort of interactional environment. (Author/TL)

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WHEN FAMILIARITY BREEDS RESPECT: TOWARD THE DEPOLARIZATION OF POLICE AND STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD EACH OTHER[1]

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It is no secret that we are living in a time of much unrest in our urban communities. While the causes of such disorder are undoubtedly numerous and are certainly a focus for a great deal of speculation and discussion, one factor is well agreed upon. Namely, that there has been a breakdown in trust and meaningful communication between police and various segments of the community.

Fortunately, the problem has not gone entirely unnoticed either by concerned members of the police force, community leaders, or social scientists (e.g., Brandstatter & Radelet, 1968). Beginning with the development of the National Center on Police and Community Relations at Michigan State University in 1955, there has been growing nationwide interest in developing and coordinating programs designed to improve police-community relations. However, while such programs aimed at improving the relations between police and selected ethnic and professional minority groups are underway in many cities (including Los Angeles, Grand Rapids, Houston, New York City, and Minneapolis), relatively little attention has been paid to enhancing relations between police and the ever-increasing minority group of late adolescent and college-age young people.

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[1]A paper read at the 51st Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association, San Francisco, California, April 21, 1971.

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The increasing hostility between police and these young people, often labeled "hippies", "yippies", "radicals", "long-hairs", and/or "activists", is well known. Hollywood has even taken to producing motion pictures to capitalize on the student-police confrontations of recent years. Unfortunately, I think that the "one-dimensional" portrayal in such films of all the parties involved, has done more harm than good in terms of arriving at a solution. Moreover, in spite of such events and warnings by numerous social observers, there has apparently been little effort on the part of police administrators to foster an understanding of protesting youth (an exception to this would be the recently begun "Community Awareness" program in Minneapolis).

Similarly, there is little evidence to suggest that students are any more well-informed as to what policemen do, think, and feel. There is also reason to suspect that the attitudes of each group toward the other group are characterized not only by such ignorance, but in addition by polarization, extremeness, and excessive stereotyping. I think that Theodore Newcomb's (1947) notion of "autistic hostility" offers a plausible explanation of why such a "gap" between police and students has resisted being "bridged" over the years.

With this background in mind, I'd like to discuss the circumstances under which our own "Depolarization Project" developed. During the spring of 1970, massive student rioting on campuses throughout the nation broke out as a protest against President Nixon's announced invasion of Cambodia by U. S. troops. Stanford University experienced the worst disorder in its history and police from all over the San Francisco Bay Area were called in to protect University property. During the peak week of the crisis, students and police clashed nightly---students threw rocks at the police and the police clubbed and arrested students. By the following week, physical contact between students and police

had ceased. However, strong anti-police sentiment pervaded the campus. Furthermore, local police departments reported intense anti-student feelings among their officers. These tensions threatened to erupt into renewed violence. In response, the "Police-Student Depolarization Project" was initiated.

The Project's primary aim was to reduce campus tensions and promote understanding between students and police. We were also actively concerned with empirically assessing the influence the Project had on the polarized attitudes of both police and students. Thus, we hoped to make a necessary beginning toward bridging the police-student "gap".

The Project was structured to promote non-violent, communicative interactions between involved students and police. After achieving the cooperation of several involved local police departments, three types of mutual communicative-oriented, non-violent contact situations were arranged between volunteer students and police. These were: (1) students <u>riding in police squad cars</u> with an individual policeman for a period of 4-8 hours on the policeman's "beat"; (2) <u>informal dinners and "rap sessions"</u> with small groups of policemen held in student's homes or dormitiories; and (3) three-hour <u>"encounter sessions"</u> between small groups of students and police. Since both student and police participants were willing to submit to evaluative procedures, in this sense they also became experimental subjects.

We expected that such contact, designed to foster mutual communication between these groups, would also increase understanding of the other group (as measured by self-report questionnaires). Moreover, attitudinal depolarization was expected to occur and be reflected in shifts from negative to positive reactions toward the other group on such questionnaire items. Unfortunately, it was impossible to assess actual <u>behavior</u> toward the other group at the time of the project. Thus, we employed a set of questionnaire items which

asked for self-report behavioral intentions (for example, the items on the table enclosed in the handout request the student's intentions to encounter police positively). Our expectancy here was that student's intended behaviors toward the police would become more cooperative and less fear-arousing.

There were a total of 164 students and 37 policemen who volunteered to participate in this project. The students were male and female undergraduate and graduate students from Stanford University, and the police were volunteers from several local police departments (e.g., Los Altos, Menlo Park, Mountain View, Palo Alto, San Jose, and the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office). 95 of the students were "controls" who did not participate in any of the contact sessions. 27 students and 12 policemen participated in the encounter session, 28 students and 13 policemen were engaged in the squad-car riding portion of the project, and 14 students and 12 policemen participated in the dinner-"rap session" program. Unfortunately, we were unable to obtain a no-treatment control group of policemen.

Students who rode in squad cars were able to observe the policemen in his "typical role". The student also was free to ask the officer about both his professional responsibilities and his personal beliefs. In the dinners and "rap sessions", informal discussions were generated on many topics of mutual concern and sessions lasted for a couple of hours. The encounter sessions utilized a professional facilitator who encouraged participants, who were broken down into small groups of 3-6 people, to express their views about themselves and the social situation.

Students who participated in the encounter sessions completed an attitudinal questionnaire just prior to and immediately following the session. Police did the same with a different questionnaire. Open-ended responses to the session as a whole were also solicited from both student and police participants.

Similar questionnaires were filled-out by students involved in the squad-car riding and dinner-"rap sessions" programs both 24 hours prior to, and following contact. Control subjects filled-out these same questionnaires on the same schedule. In addition, all student subjects answered the so-called "behavioral intention" items prior to any contact (or "wait-period" for control subjects), and again 5 weeks later.

Without discussing the individual items used in the various questionnaires, I might just briefly mention that they could be conveniently divided into three categories: (1) those that involved the understanding of one group's activities and attitudes by members of the other group (e.g., students checked a 5-point rating scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree whether "Most police visit high schools and elementary schools to give lectures"); (2) those that involved attitudinal reactions toward the other group and issues related to the other group by the members of one group (e.g., police responded to the following item: "Most students are soft and have not really experienced life"); and (3) those that involved student behavioral intentions toward police (e.g., "If I walk past a policeman on the street, I say hello, smile, or otherwise acknowledge him").

Comparisons of the pre- and post-contact responses of the subjects to these items indicated that the Project achieved its hypothesized objectives of increasing understanding between police and students (for example, police became significantly less likely to view students as taking drugs "only to escape reality"), depolarizing police and student reactions (attitudes) toward one another (for example, students became significantly more likely to disagree with statements asserting that police are "rigid", "callous", "insensitive", as well as "biased against minority races" and "long-haired males"), and finally, changing students' intended behavior toward police in the direction of becoming more cooperative and less fear-arousing (for example, students became more

likely to report that they would "say hello, smile, or otherwise acknowledge" police---see table on handout).

Although no formal attempt was made to compare the three modes of contact, the encounter sessions seemed to be the most efficient in depolarizing police and student attitudes in a short time space. It could be that the more structured nature of the encounter sessions brought the issues into focus more quickly. Of note, is that a somewhat unexpected consequence of the encounter sessions was the liberalization of police attitudes on issues important to students (including drugs, the Indochina war, and student demonstrations).

While the study did not assess which aspects of the contacts were most responsible for the effects, it certainly is likely that a "willingness to confront one another non-violently" is most important. It is indeed doubtful that such changes would have occurred among non-volunteer police and student subjects. The generalizability of the results then to these sorts of individuals is still unknown.

Besides committment to non-violent interaction, the success of the project would seem to be a function of the fact that there is much that police and students from a large university have in common. For example, members of both groups are known to be victims of prejudice and stereotyping, members of both groups tend to live in "inverted" societies characterized by clans within the group and a general ostracism from those from without, members of both groups are made constantly aware of the inequities in the legal system and society at large and are similarly frustrated in the lack of available responses to such problems, and finally, members of each group share a somewhat biased and distorted view of members of the other group which resists disconfirmation in part due to the lack of appropriate non-threatening contact.

The provision of such contact in this project seemed to enable these individuals to establish a common ground with members of the other group by

sharing their feelings about these similarities. Moreover, the contacts allowed the participants to come to know each other on a person-to-person basis and to develop trust in each other. By talking and listening to one another as human beings rather than as just representatives of their respective groups, the participants were able to share personal viewpoints and experiences. The beneficial interpersonal effects of such self-disclosure have been discussed extensively by others (e.g., Jourard, 1964). Incidentally, the open-ended responses by the participants following the encounter session provided support for this interpretation. For example, 38 of 39 participants wanted more sessions. Similarly, reactions that were fairly typical included: "I got to know students as people", "we got to see both sides of humanity" (police), "I realized that long-hairs are not necessarily up to no good", and "I now have much more compassion for cops".

It should be pointed out that several methodological flaws, which were an unavoidable consequence of doing this type of social action research, need be better controlled for in future research in this area. We are presently engaged in developing a program in Honolulu, Hawaii employing adequately matched police and student control groups, as well as actual behavioral measures of change. Moreover, we are attempting to discern which of the contact modes is most effective in producing depolarization, and which components of each mode contribute to its success.

In closing, we can say that some general answers have been provided to the question of "How can the gap between police and students be bridged?" A handful of concerned social scientists, police administrators, and students have brought two polarized groups closer together. It is our sincere hope that this kind of "grass roots" action will be undertaken elsewhere with the goal being the primary prevention of such crises situations. Moreover, while we have made a

crude, but sincere attempt to evaluate the effects of a socially relevant project, we encourage others to improve on the model. Whatever the outcomes, psychology as a science can exist comfortably with psychology as a constructive social force if psychologists are willing to apply their research skills in attempting to solve society's social problems.

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Table

Mean Self-Report Scores of Student Willingness to Encounter Police Positively[a]

Experimental Group		Item	Control Group		t
Mean Before	Mean After		Mean Before	Mean After	
3.21	2.71	If I walk past a policeman on the street, I say hello, smile or otherwise acknowledge him.	3.41	3.42	2.02[c]
4.21	3.86	If I am standing near a policeman in town, I try to engage him in conversation.	4.41	4.38	1.89[b]
4.15	4.31	If there are police on campus for riot control, I talk pleasantly with them.	4.36	4.37	.572
2.29	1.71	If there are police on campus for riot control, I avoid them as much as possible.	2.67	2.20	1.22
4.93	5.00	If there are police on campus for riot control, I verbally harass them.	4.90	4.88	1.25
5.00	5.00	If there are police on campus for riot control, I throw rocks or otherwise try to injure them.	4.98	4.98	.000
4.00	4.09	If I am at a party and I find out that there is a policeman present, I try to avoid meeting him.	3.78	3.74	.413
3.21	2.71	If I am lost and see a policeman, I will stop to ask the policeman directions.	2.84	3.02	1.95[b]
3.79	3.21	If I enter a restaurant and the counter is empty except for policeman, I sit down next to him.	3.81	3.81	1.53[b]
3.86	3.61	Total of Pooled Items	3.86	3.87	2.75[d]

[a] The scores are based on the subjects responses to a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 (always, about 100% of time event occurs) to 2 (usually, about 75% of time event occurs) to 3 (sometimes, about 50% of time event occurs) to 4 (seldom, about 25% of time event occurs) to 5 (never, about 0% of time event occurs).

[b] $p < .10$

[c] $p < .05$

[d] $p < .01$